



McCreary Centre Society

Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC):  
Youth Supported Housing Program

**Final Evaluation Report – January, 2012**

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## **BACKGROUND AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

In 2007, Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC) initiated a supported housing project and obtained market and non-profit housing units for homeless youth or those at-risk of homelessness. The rationale was to provide youth with not only housing but also support for developing the necessary skills to avoid or break the cycle of homelessness. With 30 months funding from the Vancouver Foundation's Youth Homelessness Initiative, BYRC then expanded its services and made the supported housing program available to referrals from Vancouver's three other designated youth hubs: Directions Youth Services Centre, South Vancouver Youth Centre (Connexus) and Urban Native Youth Association. The initial goal of this program was to secure housing units for 20 young people aged 16-24 and to provide them with the life-skills, financial literacy and food security skills necessary to transition from supported to independent housing. It was also envisioned that an additional 100 Scattered Site units would be added to BYRC's housing portfolio over three years.

The housing program entailed BYRC entering into agreements with housing providers wherein BYRC guaranteed rent and to repair damage beyond normal wear and tear on units rented through the program. A BYRC case manager acted as an intermediary between landlords and the program participants. Each youth had an assigned Transition to Adulthood Worker who provided a range of supports including emergency assistance. BYRC provided youth with housing start-up kits and offered workshops and one-to-one life-skills support. The housing program also aimed to connect youth with education and employment programs at BYRC, Pacific Community Resources Society (PCRS), and partner agencies.

McCreary Centre Society carried out a comprehensive evaluation of the first two years of BYRC's supported housing program, with a report released in September, 2010. Findings indicated that the program had many strengths, and the report included suggestions from BYRC staff, partner agencies, and youth participants on how the program could build on its strengths to become even stronger. For a copy of the first evaluation report, please contact BYRC.

This current evaluation report focuses on the final six months of Vancouver Foundation's funding period for the BYRC supported housing project (September, 2010 to March 31, 2011). This report also covers details of any sustained changes that occurred since the first evaluation, as well as in the six month period after funding ended (April to October, 2011).

**INTAKE AND CLIENT INFORMATION (PROVIDED BY BYRC IN JANUARY, 2012)**

A total of 71 youth were referred to the BYRC supported housing program. Eight new youth were housed since the last evaluation report in September, 2010, for a total of 63 youth who were housed through the program. Youth were in the housing program for an average of one year.

Eight youth participants were asked to leave a BYRC housing unit due to non-compliance with program rules and expectations. In all cases, this was due to substance use problems and/or severe mental health difficulties, and no appropriate low-barrier housing available for them to transition to.

BYRC has 25 housing units in its portfolio, including 15 units at Bantleman Court. Nine units had been removed from the portfolio either due to substandard conditions and landlords' unwillingness to make necessary repairs, or due to landlords deciding to end the tenancy with the program because they were not prepared to accommodate the youth who were placed with them (i.e., three landlords left the program because the youth housed in their units were disruptive or causing damage to the suite).

Please contact BYRC for more information on any of these numbers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology for this evaluation built on the original evaluation methodology of focus groups and interviews, which was found to be an effective way of eliciting information from youth, BYRC staff and other stakeholders. A separate youth and staff focus group took place in the fall of 2011, as well as two interviews with BYRC senior managers.

The staff focus group involved 17 participants—both BYRC staff and staff from BYRC’s partner agencies— three of whom had taken part in the first evaluation. The youth focus group consisted of three youth (2 males, 1 female) over the age of 19. They were all currently housed at BYRC’s Annex program, and had been living there between three weeks and four months. One youth reported involvement in another BYRC program prior to starting at the Annex. This youth lived in one of the housing program’s independent units before funding from the Vancouver Foundation ended on March 31, 2011. None of the three youth had been involved in McCreary’s first evaluation of BYRC’s housing program.

A limitation of the methodology was that only one youth who had been part of BYRC’s housing program before funding ended took part in this evaluation, despite attempts by BYRC to recruit focus group participants who had been previously involved in the program. Therefore, youth participants could not answer many questions pertaining specifically to the BYRC supported housing program. However, they provided feedback on their experiences at BYRC and changes they had heard about from peers who had been involved with BYRC and the housing program before March, 2011.

## **FINDINGS**

The final evaluation asked youth and staff about the partnership approach used by the BYRC housing program, challenges and successes relating to the program, and about developments and specific changes that took place since the last evaluation report in September 2010.

### BYRC Partnerships

Stakeholders from agencies that referred youth to the BYRC supported housing project explained that their partnerships with BYRC involved referring homeless and precariously housed youth for housing and providing a housing support team for youth transitioning out of government care. They said that their partnership with BYRC's housing program was particularly advantageous because it provided them with a referral source that was able to accommodate youth who had previously struggled to secure and maintain housing, and whom other service providers may not have been willing to accept as referrals.

Partner agency representatives said that the greatest benefit of the BYRC housing program was that landlords understood the youths' situations in advance and were therefore better equipped to house the young people, compared to landlords not involved in the housing program who tended to evict youth more quickly. They also felt that BYRC was successful in liaising between youth and the landlords. They explained that another benefit of the program was that it offered semi-independent living and assistance to young people who still needed support after age 19. They said that BYRC assisted youth to gain the necessary skills to manage their own accommodations, and equipped them with the tools and confidence to access other needed supports.

Staff from BYRC and the partner agencies reported that young people's independent living skills improved as a result of taking part in the BYRC housing program. They listed support with cooking skills and financial literacy, as well as weekly check-ins, as particularly helpful for youth. They felt that the housing program was successful in many areas, including appropriately matching youth with available housing. They explained that the program took into account individual youths' personalities and vulnerabilities, the number of people living in a home, and the characteristics of others living in a given accommodation. Additionally, social workers consistently made referrals to the BYRC housing program because of the positive reputation it had developed.

When asked what youth needed after leaving the BYRC housing program, staff from BYRC and the partner agencies listed on-going parenting support and access to supportive mental health and addictions services. They said that a continuity of mental health and addictions services was needed so that youth could receive follow-up support after leaving the program. A BYRC senior manager explained that the Urban Youth Project serves chronically homeless youth with severe concurrent disorders, but that more of these services are needed for youth transitioning into adulthood.

### Challenges

Partner agency representatives identified a lack of safe and affordable housing in Vancouver as a challenge to the housing program and to other agencies attempting to assist homeless youth. BYRC and partner agency staff also discussed other obstacles to finding housing in Vancouver, including BC Housing's long waitlist (four to five months).

Additionally, they said that youth on Agreements with Young Adults (AYA's) recently had their rental allowance cut to \$600 a month, which further limited where they could live and exacerbated the challenges that BYRC and other programs faced in finding safe and affordable housing for youth with this type of housing budget.

One of BYRC's original goals was to add 120 Scattered Site units to their housing portfolio over three years. However, a BYRC senior manager explained that they realized they could not reach this goal because rental market costs far exceeded the amount the BYRC housing program and the youth were able to pay, and no housing subsidies were available. BYRC had to therefore decline some landlords' offers because units were too expensive. BYRC staff and senior management highlighted the need for rental subsidies so that youth could access safe accommodations.

BYRC also had to decline some accommodations because of substandard conditions within the units. Some of these properties were already in BYRC's housing portfolio but deteriorated considerably when the landlord stopped doing repairs or maintenance. Therefore, the program decided to help the youth residing there to move out and find safer and more sanitary accommodations. BYRC staff and senior management described the ethical dilemma they faced when having to choose between accruing housing of substandard quality or youth having nowhere to live.

A number of landlords declined to participate in the BYRC housing program for various reasons, including wanting more income for their suites than BYRC or the youth could provide; not wanting to receive government-issued rent cheques; or deciding not to rent to young people.

Another challenge faced by the housing program was linked to supporting increasing numbers of youth with mental health issues who needed housing. Staff reported that there were insufficient services available in Vancouver to youth 19 and over who needed mental health support.

BYRC staff explained that as part of the program they tried easing young people's transition from youth to adult mental health services by attempting to connect youth to appropriate adult services before their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. However, they said that this process was difficult because the adult and youth systems did not work in unison. As a result, youth had to wait until they turned 19 to be eligible for adult services, which created obstacles for transitioning smoothly between youth and adult mental health services.

#### Changes since Last Evaluation Report

Although BYRC did not reach their original goal of 120 units, they did obtain four additional Scattered Site units since the last evaluation report (September, 2010). More youth were also housed in BYRC's existing accommodations, including the Annex which houses six youth and a caretaker. Further, BYRC took over the management of Bantleman Court which added 15 self-contained units to BYRC's housing portfolio.

The number of youth in the housing program increased, due in large part to BYRC's partnerships with other agencies. For example, the Urban Youth Project (UYP) approached BYRC for a partnership because of BYRC's successful housing support program. This partnership involves youth being housed through UYP but receiving support through BYRC.

### *The Annex*

Youth from the Annex who took part in the focus group reported living there predominantly because of financial reasons. They said that the Annex provided a structured place to live, and there were expectations that youth had to meet. They explained that they appreciated the monthly rent of \$425 which enabled them to live in an area of Vancouver that would otherwise be unaffordable to them. They also appreciated the convenient and central location of the Annex. However, they stated that they would prefer living on their own and without a caretaker if they could afford to do so.

Youth living at the Annex appreciated the informal and individualized support they received from a BYRC worker, including help with budgeting, goal setting, and buying housing supplies. They also reported receiving support from a psychiatrist, which they said was helpful, and that they knew how to access other support if they needed to do so. Youth felt that the Annex provided excellent short-term accommodation and that the BYRC worker was very helpful and always available to assist them.

When asked about any changes at the Annex since the funding ended, youth said that they now needed to contribute to housing supplies (around \$5 each), whereas their understanding from peers who had been there longer was that these supplies had previously been covered by BYRC.

### *Bantleman Court*

Bantleman Court offers subsidized housing exclusively to youth ages 16 to 24 who receive a small rent subsidy (under \$400) from the government. BYRC had taken over the full management of Bantleman Court which enabled them to improve the quality of services and to create a more welcoming environment there. Youth reported that conditions had greatly improved at Bantleman, and that the building looked cleaner and felt safer.

Staff said that a community steering committee was being developed to assess the type of support that could be provided to residents at Bantleman on a continuing basis. There may be insufficient resources to provide one-on-one support, but the plan is to deliver workshops to groups of youth on site (“Passport to Independence”) so that youth can be supported after they secure housing at Bantleman.

### *Effects of funding ending*

BYRC staff stated that the end of the housing program’s funding on March 31, 2011 led to a reduction of available workers, less support for youth, and a greater caseload for the remaining staff. They explained that 1.5 positions had to be absorbed, and that the remaining staff had to manage the scattered sites and Bantleman Court on top of their other responsibilities.

BYRC staff said that another impact of the funding ending was a decrease in the number of housing units in their portfolio, including a loss of their three suites for parenting youth. They explained that following the removal of the substandard housing units from the portfolio, no staff was available to recruit new landlords or manage the existing portfolio. Further, even if more suites were added, there was concern that there would be insufficient staff available to provide support. In fact, an opportunity arose that would have added 12 units to BYRC’s housing portfolio, but the program had to decline the landlord’s offer because they did not have the level of staffing that would have been needed.



BYRC managers noted that referrals from social workers (MCFD) and VACFASS (Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society) have increased for youth nearing their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, whereas referrals from partner agencies have decreased. Partner agency staff explained that they made fewer referrals to BYRC now that the housing program had ended because they were aware that housing resources had decreased. Instead, they relied more on websites like Craigslist to find housing for youth. However, their clients still accessed BYRC's start-up kits which were very useful.

Also, partner agency staff regarded BYRC as a hub of youth services beyond housing support. They explained that the office was conveniently located in East Vancouver and easily accessible by public transit, and youth came to BYRC to use the computers and access a variety of services and support (e.g., food, healthcare, showers, laundry, schooling, LOVE media program).

The consensus among staff was that sustained funding to the BYRC housing program would have been helpful to continue to support youth. However, BYRC senior management and staff emphasized that they would still struggle with expanding their rental stock as long as youth did not receive rent subsidies.

### Moving Forward

BYRC senior managers said that if they were to receive more funding for the housing program, they would draw on lessons learned to modify the program. For example, they felt that the Scattered Sites model did not work as effectively as they had anticipated due to high market costs, a shortage of safe and affordable housing, and the lack of housing subsidies available to youth. BYRC staff and managers felt that a scattered site model had little chance of success in the current housing market in Vancouver without the provision of housing subsidies for youth. As a result, they would focus on other housing models, including the peer-support model at the Annex, or on opportunities akin to the management of Bantleman Court.

BYRC staff also recognized the importance of creating sustainable partnerships to ensure youth receive the best possible 'wrap around' service and have the greatest options, and would look to solidify and create more partnerships while allowing sufficient time for these to grow and develop.

BYRC staff felt that funding from Vancouver Foundation helped to establish BYRC as a solid housing program with a reputation for delivering quality services to youth with a range of needs. They stated that they will "continue to see ripple effects of that funding." They added that lessons learned during the course of the supported housing program will continue to improve BYRC's services and the housing support they provide to youth.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, staff from BYRC and the partner agencies were very satisfied with the supported housing program and with BYRC's partnerships. Further, staff and youth discussed changes since the last evaluation report, including BYRC taking over the management of Bantleman Court.

A methodological limitation was that only one participant in the youth focus group had been involved in BYRC's housing program before funding ended. Therefore, youths' perspectives on changes at BYRC were likely not fully captured in this report. It may be that most youth previously involved in the housing program were currently living independently without support from BYRC, which made it difficult to engage them in this evaluation. Despite this limitation, valuable information was collected from youth and staff.

Youth who took part in the focus group for this second evaluation reported positive changes in areas that had been identified as in need of improvement by young people in the first evaluation. For example, in the first evaluation youth in the BYRC supported housing program indicated improvements in a number of areas (housekeeping, self-care, maintaining their housing, etc.) but minimal improvements in money management, development of job skills and employment planning. It was therefore encouraging that youth who took part in the second evaluation appreciated the individualized and informal support they received around money management.

Also, youth who took part in the first evaluation suggested that Bantleman Court could be improved by making it feel more like a community. Feedback collected during this evaluation suggested that BYRC's management of Bantleman Court has indeed led to a safer and more welcoming environment there.

BYRC learned important lessons over the course of the supported housing program, including the time it takes for partnerships to "take hold," and challenges associated with the Scattered Site model. Moreover, BYRC's difficulties accruing safe and affordable units to their housing portfolio highlighted the need for youth to receive housing subsidies.

As demonstrated through successful housing models that have offered subsidies, subsidies would enable young people to find safe accommodations and would support them in maintaining their housing and living independently.